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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 117582

E.O. 12065: GDS 5/6/87 (BURT, RICHARD R.)

TAGS: SOPN, MASS, IS, SA

SUBJECT: AWACS CAPABILITIES PRESS GUIDANCE (U)

REF: TEL AVIV 06761, (NOTAL)

1. (U) THE FOLLOWING PRESS GUIDANCE IS FORWARDED IN RESPONSE TO REFTEL. IT HAS BEEN CLEARED WITHIN STATE AND WITH DEFENSE AND IS CONSISTENT WITH PRESS GUIDANCE BEING USED HERE. YOU MAY USE THESE QS AND AS AS YOU DEEM NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE.

2. (U) Q. (U) WOULDN'T THE AWACS GREATLY INCREASE THE SAUDIS' OFFENSIVE CAPABILITIES?

3. A. (U) NO. AWACS IS A DEFENSIVE SYSTEM. IT CARRIES NO WEAPONS. THE AWACS IS ESSENTIALLY A FLYING RADAR STATION WHICH ENABLES A DEFENDER TO DETECT AND FOLLOW MOVEMENTS OF APPROACHING AIRCRAFT SOONER THAN HE COULD USING SOLELY GROUND-BASED RADARS. IT HAS THE CAPABILITY TO DETECT NAVAL CRAFT, BUT IT CANNOT REPEAT CANNOT SPOT GROUND TARGETS SUCH AS TANKS AND OTHER ARMORED VEHICLES, MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, ETC. (FYI: (C) WHEN LOOKINGDOWN AT THE GROUND, THE AWACS' RADAR "SCREENS OUT, STATIONARY

AND SLOW MOVING OBJECTS, AND DISPLAYS ONLY OBJECTS MOVING AT A SPEED OF 80 KNOTS (92 MILES OR 148 KILOMETERS PER HOUR) OR GREATER. TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD RESULT IN EXTENSIVE RADAR "GROUND CLUTTER," WHICH WOULD OVERLOAD THE SYSTEM; MAKING IT VIRTUALLY USELESS. END FYI). THE PRIMARY REASON THE SAUDIS WANT AWACS IS TO IMPROVE THEIR ABILITY TO DEFEND THEIR VULNERABLE OIL FIELDS IN THE NORTHEAST.

3. (U) Q. COULDN'T THE SAUDI AWACS BE USED TO GUIDE OTHER ARAB PLANES IN AN ATTACK ON ISRAEL?

. A. -- FOR A SAUDI AWACS TO COOPERATE EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES WOULD REQUIRE EXTENSIVE ADVANCE JOINT PLANNING, TRAINING, AND COMPATIBLE SECURE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS WHICH OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES DO NOT POSSESS.

. . -- BECAUSE OF OUR LONG-TERM INVOLVEMENT IN SAUDI AWACS OPERATIONS, WE WOULD BE AWARE IF SAUDI ARABIA BEGAN TO MAKE SUCH ADVANCE PLANNING AND TRAINING PREPARATIONS.

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ADDITIONALLY, WE WOULD HAVE TO PROVIDE EQUIPMENT TO OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES IF THLY WERE TO ESTABLISH AN AWACS-COMPATIBLE SECURE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM.

. . -- NONE OF THIS WOULD BE IN ACCORD WITH OUR SALES AGREEMENT WITH SAUDI ARABIA. THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE SAUDI ARABIA HAS ANY INTENTION TO VIOLATE OUR AGREEMENT.

(FYI: (LOU) A SAUDI AWACS COULD, IN SOME SITUATIONS, PASS SOME LIMITED INFORMATION TO OTHER ARAB AIRCRAFT BY VOICE RADIO. HOWEVER, SINCE THESE AIRCRAFT WOULD NOT BE EQUIPPED WITH SPECIALIZED COMPATIBLE CRYPTOGRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS GEAR, THIS DATA WOULD HAVE TO BE PASSED BY REGULAR RADIO. IT WOULD THUS BE SUBJECT TO JAMMING AND/OR COMPROMISE. WITHOUT THE ADVANCE PLANNING AND TRAINING DESCRIBED ABOVE, SUCH DATA WOULD BE OF LITTLE USE. END FYI).

4. (U) Q. WHAT IS THE RANGE OF THE AWACS' RADAR?

. A. THE AWACS CAN DETECT LOW-FLYING AIRCRAFT AT A RANGE OF ABOUT 200 NAUTICAL MILES (370KM; 230 STATUTE MILES). ITS RANGE AGAINST MEDIUM AND HIGH-ALTITUDE AIRCRAFT IS SOMEWHAT GREATER -- APPROXIMATELY 300 (556KM; 345 STATUTE MILES) NAUTICAL MILES.

5. (U) Q. WOULD A SAUDI AWACS POSSESS INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION CAPABILITIES?

. A. NO. ALTHOUGH THE AWACS, LIKE OTHER AIRCRAFT, HAS ON-BOARD RADIO RECEIVERS, AWACS DOES NOT POSSESS RADIO MONITORING, PHOTO RECONNAISSANCE, OR OTHER INTELLIGENCE GATHERING CAPABILITIES. IT WILL INCORPORATE COMMERCIAL SUBSTITUTES FOR SENSITIVE US MILITARY CRYPTOGRAPHIC COMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT.

6. (U) Q. WILL THE US EXERCISE ANY CONTROL OVER THE SAUDI AWACS AFTER THE SALE?

. A. WE AND THE SAUDIS ARE COOPERATING NOW VERY CLOSELY IN THE OPERATION OF THE FOUR AWACS WE HAVE DEPLOYED TO SAUDI ARABIA. IT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT THAT WHEN THE SAUDIS RECEIVE THEIR AWACS WE WILL BENEFIT FROM THE SAME KIND OF MUTUAL ARRANGEMENTS. WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO BE TOO SPECIFIC ON THE MODALITIES AT THIS STAGE, HOWEVER. WE EXPECT TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK MORE PRECISELY ON THIS SUBJECT WHEN WE MAKE THE FORMAL NOTIFICATION OF THE SALE OF CONGRESS. OBVIOUSLY, AS WITH ANY HIGH TECHNOLOGY SALE, CONTINUED SUPPLIES OF US SPARE PARTS, AS WELL AS PERIODIC MAJOR MAINTENANCE OVERHAULS WILL BE NECESSARY TO KEEP THESE AIRCRAFT OPERATIONAL. HAIG

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